

**Samuel Proctor Oral History Program**  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Program Director: Dr. Paul Ortiz  
Office Manager: Tamarra Jenkins  
Technology Coordinator: Deborah Hendrix



241 Pugh Hall  
PO Box 115215  
Gainesville, FL 32611  
352-392-7168 Phone  
352-846-1983 Fax

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Transcribed interviews are available through SPOHP for use by research scholars, students, journalists, and other interested groups. Material is frequently used for theses, dissertations, articles, books, documentaries, museum displays, and a variety of other public uses. As standard oral history practice dictates, SPOHP recommends that researchers refer to both the transcript and audio of an interview when conducting their work. A selection of interviews are available online here through the UF Digital Collections and the UF Smathers Library system.

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*-October 2013*

PCM-021

Interviewee: Malena, Didi, and Fred Brewer

Interviewer: Candice Ellis

Date: July 2, 2010

E: It's July 2, 2010. This is Candice Ellis and—

N: Amanda Noll.

E: We're interviewing—

DB: Didi Bremer.

MB: Malena Bremer.

FB: Fred Bremer.

E: All right. The best place to start, I guess, is from the beginning. How did your family and yourselves find yourself in the Canal Zone?

DB: Well, the time was the French building of the canal when our families actually began with the arrival of **John LaPriere** and **Edmund Veysset**, or it was the opposite. Anyhow, they came from France. They were not coming for the construction of the canal but rather as wine distributors. So, they came and distributed French wine. Of course, there was quite a market for it. It took a lot of courage and initiative. From there—these were great-grandparents—so our great-grandmother, Elena Veysset, was raised in Panama by French parents.

FB: Our grandmother.

MB: Our grandmother.

DB: Our grandmother, excuse me; grandmother Elena Veysset, raised in Panama by the French parents. In the meantime, our grandfather came from—

FB: Jamaica.

DB: You can tell that part of the story. [Laughter]

FB: Our grandfather, who came from Jamaica, came to Panama to start his own business. It was in the agriculture supplies and veterinary supplies business.

MB: He was an Englishman.

DB: From—oh, you said Jamaica.

FB: From Jamaica, a Brit from Jamaica. Spoke with a Jamaican accent. [Laughter]

DB: The old bajan accents, we love it.

FB: But very white.

DB: He began his own import-export business with the idea of these agricultural veterinary products, but he went into business with a Danish man and is credited—

FB: **Mr. Eshoy?**

DB: Mr. Eshoy, what was his first name?

FB: I can't remember his first name; Mr. Eshoy, Danish.

DB: And they're credited for importing the Canal Zone matches from Sweden. I have a box up in my room and I neglected to bring it with me, I'm sorry.

FB: There's a pack in the museum.

DB: There is, really?

FB: Yeah.

DB: That's awesome, so the museum has it.

FB: Yeah, a pack of about twelve. They were specially made because of the humidity in Panama.

E: I wonder if they'd still light. [Laughter]

DB: The little box I have, the little ends where you brush the match, that's all worn out. So, somehow, this Jamaican gentleman—Brit—got together with this French lady, so then the pictures . . . the French connection is so fascinating.

MB: This is their wedding picture.

N: Oh, wow. That's a very ornate dress.

E: Yeah.

DB: That was about 1909, approximately. 1910.

FB: Wouldn't it show?

DB: I should have highlighted the dates, but . . . see, this goes off onto the line; it runs in the family.

N: That's great. Is that your family tree?

DB: This is part of the—

FB: It's the long branch. [Laughter]

MB: It's one of Ita's sisters; my grandmother's Elena Veysset. Her sister, Sarah Veysset, ended up marrying an American and moving to the United States. So, we've been in touch with that branch of the French family.

N: Wow.

DB: But we called our grandparents Ito and Ita.

FB: Which was short for—

DB: *Abuelito* and *abuelita*. So, although they were French and Brits, they spoke Spanish in the home, and English, but with the British and Jamaican accent. But

Ito's business, the import business, *Agencias Escoffery*, has been in the family ever since and is now run by our cousin and his son, Pancho Guardia Escoffery and his son, Tom.

FB: Did we even mention our grandfather's name, Escoffery?

DB: Escoffery, yes, *Agencias*—did we mention that? Very disjointed. [Laughter]

FB: E-s-c-o-f-f-e-r-y. So, Elena, they say, got together with Frances Escoffery—

MB: They say.

FB: They say. And produced—

DB: Six.

FB: Six children.

MB: One of them being our mother.

DB: One of them was our mother, so there was only one brother. Back in those days, my grandfather ended up buying some property up in Volcan. Have you been to Panama?

N: No.

E: No. [Laughter]

DB: Oh, gosh.

N: I'm heard about that area, though.

DB: Okay. Well, Volcan is really very close to the Costa Rican border. He raised cattle there, and at one point, his only son started a powdered milk factory. Remember the...not Similac? What am I thinking? ***Calla limeño***.

FB: Yeah, Klim.

DB: Vitalac, Vitalac.

MB: V-i-t-a-l-a-c.

FB: Oh, okay. I didn't know that.

DB: In any case, the story is that, when they travel from Panama up to Volcan—back when our mother and her siblings, her five siblings, were little—they would drive as far as David and go by horseback all the way up to Volcan. At one point, our grandmother, Ita Elena Veysset Escoffery, she was pregnant with her youngest daughter, Ima. Pregnant and going by horseback from David to Volcan.

[Laughter] Which now is an hour's drive, and so you can imagine, by horseback, how long it took. These were very courageous people. I mean, adventurous and courageous to do that. Horses weren't air-conditioned, either. [Laughter] What else can we tell you about Ito and Ita? Oh, well, so they raised the five daughters and one son, and our mother was the third of the daughters. Since our grandfather was British, he sent most of the kids away to college to study. He worked very hard and provided for their ability. The oldest two went to England to study, and our mother was the third. She was sent to the United States. So then—

MB: Washington, D.C.

DB: Washington, D.C. George Washington University.

MB: George Washington University.

DB: Tell them about—

FB: Isn't there Temple Secretarial School in there somewhere?

DB: Left that part out.

MB: She took courses at both places. Anyway, that's where she met our father.

DB: But, while she was there, she made quite a name for herself. Yes. [Laughter]

N: And what years was she there?

DB: She was there 1938—let me think. I was born in [19]43, she was married in [19]42. It must have been [19]39, [19]40, [19]41 that she was there. Of course, World War II was really picking up speed. So, our dad was in Washington, going to night school at G.W. So, they met in Washington and they were married in Washington, and my mother was given away by the Panamanian ambassador. She was married at St. Stephen's Church in Georgetown in Washington, D.C. The reception was at the Panamanian embassy. But, before they were even married—tell her the story about how she made a name for herself.

MB: Oh, yeah. After she finished school—or, while she was in school—she ended up being, she took that dictation from Eleanor Roosevelt.

N: Oh, wow.

MB: It was a sort of—

FB: Internship.

MB: Internship sort of thing. So, she was very excited about that. Anyway, that's a picture of her taking—

N: Wow.

MB: This is a copy from a newspaper. She was also, what was it?

DB: Cherry Blossom.

MB: She was also a candidate for Queen of George Washington University was also one of the—what did you call them?

DB: Princess of the Cherry Blossom Festival.

MB: She was a princess on the Cherry Blossom festival, on the float. She was a Panamanian beauty, she really was.

DB: This is her high school picture.

E: She's gorgeous.

DB: High school. But it was during that period that a dashing young man from Pennsylvania swept her off her feet in his gallant uniform. He was an officer of the Army Air Corps. This is before the air force existed. As such, after—well, they parted company because of the war. Dad was sent overseas—

MB: After they were married.

DB: After they were married, he was sent overseas. Back then, of course, she got pregnant right away. So, she went home to Panama, which is when I was born, a few months later after she got to Panama. We lived with my grandparents until my father got back from the war. I was almost three. Back then, you didn't see your—I mean, they were separated for that long a period of time. There were no psychologists that met with you when you got back. [Laughter] You just did it, because they were very strong people. It saddens me to think that we're getting softer and softer as the generations go by. But, anyhow. We still have a pretty strong military, that's for sure.

MB: And he decided to settle down there after he got back.

DB: Yeah, he was actually transferred down there. By that time, the air force came into being; separated from the army, and there was an air force, U.S. Air Force. So, he was transferred to Albrook Air Force Base in the Canal Zone.

FB: What year was this in?

DB: That would have been [19]46—no, [19]45, because Joey, our oldest brother, was born in [19]46. So, it must have been the latter part of 1945. But he stayed in the inactive reserve—

FB: Active reserve.

DB: Active reserve. Because I remember him putting his uniform on and, because of the tropics, the uniforms were Bermuda shorts. But he still had the bars and all the...

FB: So, he got out of the active air force and went into the—

MB: Reserves.

DB: Reserves.

FB: Air force reserves, but continued working as a civilian for, now, the army.

DB: But, as the family grew, my brother Joe was born in [19]46, and then Malena came along in 40—

MB: [19]48.

DB: [19]48. Then, Fred came along and then our youngest brother came along. But, in the meantime, I think my father began to see that he would have to do something to get all of us through college, so he started a chicken farm.

[Laughter]

MB: In addition to his regular job.

DB: In addition to the regular job, and the air force reserve, he had a chicken farm.

FB: And that was unusual, that people in the Canal Zone had a side business.

DB: Yes, that's right.

FB: That really wasn't . . .

DB: It wasn't prevalent at all.

FB: No, very few.

DB: But he ended up selling eggs to the commissary—

MB: And to the airlines.

DB: And to the airlines. It was really quite successful. He had a partner, John Findleson, who was also a Zonian.

FB: They bought that farm in [19]53.

DB: 1953, so, I was ten.

FB: The year I was born.

DB: The year you were born—my gosh. I wish we still had it now. Panama is so vital and, just, booming. They sold it at some point, in [19]70—

FB: [19]74.

DB: So, they had a good ten years, eleven years.

N: Was the farm in the Zone itself?

DB: No.

MB: Twenty years.

FB: Twenty-one years.

DB: Twenty-one years.

FB: [19]53 to [19]74.

DB: [19]53 to [19]74, what am I saying? Twenty-one years. The farm was not in the Canal Zone. It couldn't be; it wasn't allowed. You couldn't have an individual business—

FB: Private enterprise.

DB: Private enterprise in the Canal Zone. It was all government. It was either Panama Canal Company, Canal Zone government, or U.S. military or civilian—civilian working with the military.

FB: Working with the military.

DB: Which is what he did when he got out of the air force and he went to work for the Army Transportation Corps, although he still had his obligatory two weeks a year, I think, in the air force. So then, the five of us went through Balboa High School, except for my youngest brother. By that time, our parents moved to California, so he went to high school in California. But the four of us graduated from Balboa High School.

E: And what was that like? The high school experience?

DB: Well, high school in the Canal Zone was fascinating because there was no competition in terms of fashion. Everybody was kind of the same, you know. So, you didn't . . . I think there was a lot of value to that.

FB: There was no fashion. [Laughter]

MB: There was no fashion. You weren't allowed to wear slacks; you had to wear a skirt or a dress. Boys could not wear jeans in public high school.

FB: Remember, in the Canal Zone, everyone got a job. Okay? There is no upper class or lower class. Everyone's middle class. Sure, some people—depending on their position—made a little more, but there essentially wasn't any distinction between classes. So, everyone went to the same schools, except for private school.

DB: Yeah, some people went to private school.

FB: Which we did. There was a Catholic school.

DB: Up until the eighth grade, went to private school.

MB: For elementary school.

FB: For elementary school. Then, once you finished eighth grade, then, there was only public school.

DB: But, during that time, when I was still in high school, our mother began the first FM and bilingual radio station. So, this young Panamanian beauty went off to become a very enterprising businesswoman like my dad was, also. And the station was called TNT Kaboom.

MB: TNT Kaboom.

FB: What did the TNT stand for?

DB: Top Network Tunes. [Laughter]

FB: Yeah.

DB: So, I went off to college right after she began that business, and I would send her the 45s. All the popular songs, I'd mail them home to her to use at her radio station. She employed a lot of Canal Zone kids, right?

FB: I wouldn't say a lot, but John Bateman—

MB: A couple of GIs, too.

FB: Yeah. John Bateman. They were employed as announcers; they made the advertisements.

DB: Then she'd play all these English tunes, which became very popular. What else did—oh, she volunteered as a Gray Lady at the hospital.

MB: And she snuck out—

DB: Oh, Margot Fonteyn.

MB: Margot Fonteyn. There was political chaos at a certain period of time, and she had to sneak out one of the politicians' wife: Margot Fonteyn, the famous English ballerina. So, she snuck her out in a car, under a blanket.

DB: Can you imagine?

MB: Dashed her to a plane so they could put her on and get her out of the country.

DB: But I think the reason she was asked to do that—she was employed by the Pan-American newspaper, and that was owned by a man named Armonio Arias. The Arias family is a very prominent family in Panama. He was married to Margot Fonteyn, right?

MB: One of the Ariases was, I'm not sure which one.

DB: It was he, though, her boss, who asked her to do this; to sneak her out of the country. One time, she phoned me at school and said Clark Gable is in town with his wife and he needs transportation from his yacht out to the airport. Would you like to go? Do you think you'd be permitted to get out of class to go to the airport? I said, of course, of course. I went down to the office right away and got permission from Marie Weir, was the vice principal.

MB: This was in high school?

DB: High school. I think I was a freshman or a sophomore. So, she picked me up first, and then we went over to the pier; found the yacht and picked up Clark Gable and his wife and one other couple. I sat in the backseat between them, you know. [Laughter] Clark Gable sat with his wife and Mommy, in the front seat. But we drove out to Ticumen Airport, and I remember just being in awe of this man. He was so handsome. I was all of fourteen years old. When they left to board the airplane, I went over to where he had been standing with his leg up on a ledge, and he had been flicking the ashes from his cigarette or his cigar. I got the ashes—[Laughter] And my mother dropped me off at the ballpark, near home, on our way back. I went up to everybody and said, look, these are the ashes that Clark Gable, from his cigarette, or his cigar, or whatever. [Laughter] Anyway, she was always involved in something like that. It was amazing. What else?

FB: So, life in the Canal Zone. It was great.

DB: Oh, it was fantastic.

FB: What are some unique things? Oh, there were two high schools, that's it. You know, Balboa High School and Cristobal High School, about fifty miles apart. They were the rivals.

MB: Well, we played the junior college in football, also.

FB: Oh, and the junior college. Right. So, our football league consisted of four teams: the athletic club—

MB: The athletic club.

FB: Which were guys that finished high school and went into the apprentice program down there; the junior college; Cristobal High School and Balboa High School. [Laughter] You'd play each team about two times, so you had a season of six games. [Laughter]

MB: That's it.

DB: That's all. It has to have been more than that. But we had the Palm Bowl at the end of the year.

FB: Yeah, at the end of the season.

DB: There was always the jamboree. We would take this rickety train that was awesome, with rattan seats, and it would just shimmy all the way across. Remember? To go from Balboa to the Pacific side, crossing over to the Atlantic side of the isthmus, we'd take this train. And, you know, cheering on the train. Malena and I were both cheerleaders in high school. You just couldn't get enough of it, you know? So much fun. I mean, good, clean, wholesome fun. It was fantastic.

E: I'm sorry, you guys lived on the Pacific side?

FB: Yes.

DB: Right.

FB: We lived in different—the first assignment with Dad was through Albrook, right?

DB: Right.

FB: Albrook Air Force base. Then he was there how long?

DB: Very short period of time; I think a year.

FB: Then you moved to where?

DB: Then, they moved to Curundu Heights, the lower level. I know I was five. I had my fifth birthday there. That was civilians that worked for the army. Then we moved to Curundu itself, which was when Joey was born, and then we moved to the Atlantic side, which we called the other side. [Laughter]

FB: So, this is where, Cocoli?

MB: That's where I was born.

DB: That's where you were born.

MB: Then we moved back.

FB: Where on the Atlantic side did you live?

DB: Gulick.

FB: Oh, Fort Gulick.

DB: Fort Gulick.

FB: Another army base.

DB: And there was a small, civilian section in Fort Gulick. I mean, the active military had the big concrete homes. We had these little cottages; they were wooden cottages up on stilts. That was Gulick.

FB: Then they were in Fort Gulick for about how long?

DB: Two years, perhaps. I was there first and second grade.

FB: And then back to the Pacific side?

DB: Then back to the Pacific side, and that's when we moved to Curundu Heights up on the hill; that used to be called Christmas Heights at Christmastime.

FB: What year did we move into Curundu Heights?

DB: I was in third grade, so—

FB: [19]51 and—

DB: 1951.

FB: And we lived there until 1967. December of 1967, we moved, left Curundu Heights.

MB: Left the Canal Zone.

FB: Left the Canal Zone and moved into Panama City.

E: And you were essentially moving, following your father's jobs?

DB: Correct.

E: It's really interesting to me, the Atlantic and the Pacific side; you know, the other side and that kind of sentiment surrounding it. But, were there any great economic or demographic or social differences that you guys really noticed moving between the sides? Is one side wealthier or the other side maybe...

FB: Not in the Canal Zone.

MB: Not in the Canal Zone.

DB: No, although you might say that, because the Pacific side had Panama City, which was more vibrant; had more cultural activities and things, the capital, that perhaps we drew a lot of Panamanians attended the high school. Either their parents, they had to pay a certain tuition—

MB: They had to pay tuition.

DB: At the high school, but I think on the Cristobal side there was less of that; there was less interaction with Panamanians. They didn't have the Panamanian enrollment, at least the percentage that we had.

FB: Because the city on the Atlantic side, Colón, was not as affluent as Panama City.

DB: Correct.

E: Right.

FB: Totally different, if you do any research or study...

DB: I'm trying to remember, as far as the kids themselves.

MB: No, I don't remember feeling any difference. It's really strange. [Laughter]

DB: I think I felt very fortunate to have a bicultural type of upbringing, because my mother—being Panamanian—we would go into the city a lot, and spend Sundays with my grandparents and all the aunts and uncles and cousins. So, we were raised with Spanish and English, whereas, I think a lot of American families that went to Balboa High School and Cristobal High School, they didn't have that advantage. They were all Americans, and then the maids that they employed

were from the islands, and they spoke English with that Bajan accent. I don't know if that's the correct description of it or not. Bajan accent?

FB: Yeah.

DB: The island accent. So, in that regard there was a difference.

MB: And, when we were growing up down there, there was no drinking age limit.

FB: In the Canal Zone, there was.

MB: But not in Panama. [Laughter]

DB: Do we want to divulge that? [Laughter]

N: It sounds intriguing.

MB: I'm going to divulge that. When I went up, she had already started college—you were done with college in Washington, D.C. when I went up?

DB: I was finished.

FB: Yeah, you finished in [19]65; you went up in [19]67.

MB: No, this was before I graduated. I went up the summer before, in [19]66 or [19]65, and visited my older sister and my older brother at Christmastime. She was living just outside of Washington, D.C. or in Washington, D.C., and there was a favorite bar in Georgetown that they all used to like to go to. So, my mother said, gee, while you're visiting there, you're gonna want to go with them. So, hmm, let's go down the Driver's Division in Panama City and we'll get you a driver's license that says you're eighteen already. [Laughter] Which we did. She went down and gave the guy twenty bucks, got a license that said I was already

eighteen, so I went to visit them and I got to go to Georgetown and all—wherever you went. [Laughter]

DB: How about that? Oh, my god.

MB: Needless to say, when I went off to college, I still had that same...

FB: Attitude. [Laughter]

MB: Same attitude. That driver's license, I used it.

DB: One of the things I remember vividly about high school, since I was the oldest one, was that it was very hot. We had no air conditioning. So, by the time I got to be a senior, there were a few of us that were really pushing for air conditioning. Somehow, we got it through the student association and in through the administration and it was approved; we got air conditioning. [Laughter] They were only window air conditioners, but nonetheless. You know, installing central air would have been costly, to say the least.

MB: We would make a trip to the U.S. every third summer, because it was paid; the transportation was paid for. I'll never forget seeing my first escalators, because we had no escalators in Panama at the time. Going back to Panama and just being so excited about escalators, and wondering when are they going to put escalators in? [Laughter]

FB: We would typically fly from Howard Air Force Base or Albrook—

DB: Or Albrook, either one.

FB: Up to Charleston, South Carolina. Unload there and then you usually get on a train.

DB: An overnight train.

FB: To either DC or go all the way up to Pittsburgh and Johnstown.

DB: All the way up to—

FB: Or Detroit.

DB: To New Jersey. Our father, as we mentioned, had been in the military, but he came, originally, from Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He was one of ten. Two three of his brothers, lived in New Jersey, so we would take the train up from Charleston all the way up to New Jersey, where he'd pick up a new car, I think.

FB: Right.

DB: And we'd go visiting his three brothers there and then trek across Pennsylvania Turnpike to Johnstown to visit Uncle Ben's and then to—

FB: Pittsburgh.

DB: Pittsburgh, to visit Aunt Marie.

FB: And then go on to Detroit.

DB: And up to Detroit.

FB: To visit Aunt Dolly and Uncle Albert.

DB: Aunt Dolly and...

MB: And we had all our cousins convinced that we lived in the jungle, in a treehouse, and that we played with all the animals. It was fun, we could tell them...

DB: We had to ride water buffalos down the canal to get to school or something like that. [Laughter] It was ridiculous. Oh.

MB: Oh, we had such a great time.

DB: Good stories. Every three years, that trip. And, before we started flying from Panama to Charleston, we would take a ship—Military Sea Transport Service, M.S.T.S., all the way to New York. So, that was quite an adventure.

FB: On the Panama line?

DB: Not the Panama line—

MB: Military.

DB: Military Sea Transport, M.S.T.S.

FB: Oh, I don't remember that one.

DB: Then it was M.A.T.S., Military Air Transport Service, because of Dad working for the army.

FB: I do remember taking a trip to New Orleans on the *S.S. Cristobal*.

DB: Now, that was a Panama Canal line.

FB: Yeah, that was part of the Panama line.

DB: So, how were you entitled to do that?

FB: I have no idea, but I remember getting seasick, and the pictures—there are pictures of the *Cristobal*, you know, down in the museum.

DB: Really? Oh.

FB: When I saw a picture of the museum—Joey and I were, yeah.

DB: Really?

FB: And to prevent getting seasick, you had to swim in the pool.

MB: Yeah. [Laughter]

FB: There was a little bitty pool about half the size of this room.

MB: Float in the pool and you don't get seasick when you're—

DB: Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh, you were so lucky.

FB: Yeah, that was around [19]60 or [19]61.

MB: I did not get seasick. I laughed at my two brothers for . . .

FB: Who was it? The three of us and Dad, right? You, Joe and I, and Dad.

DB: I'll be darned. I stayed home with Mommy. We'll have to find out how you were entitled to do that. [Laughter]

MB: The other thing not there—I'm sure you all heard that everybody had maids.

DB: Yes.

MB: So, even though we were middle class, we had maids. They sent people out to keep our lawns trimmed and everything like that. The place was just—

DB: Immaculate.

MB: Immaculate. Everywhere you went, the Canal Zone was immaculate.

FB: There was no trash.

MB: It was weird.

FB: There were no homeless.

DB: It's quite a shock when you move up here. Of course, now, the Canal Zone has been defunct for the past ten years, but on the downside of that is, they were so careful about eliminating mosquitos that these DDT trucks would come through and we'd run out and play in the smoke, the mist. Some of us would keep our head up above the smoke, and we'd be running and you couldn't see the limbs, the legs moving beneath. [Laughter]

N: Wow.

FB: You haven't heard those stories yet? Running behind DDT trucks?

E: No—

MB: You're trying to hold your breath.

FB: Oh, yeah, trying to hold your breath. Who could hold the breath the longest following the DDT truck.

MB: Who could hold their breath the longest as you ran behind the DDT truck, which is a chemical no longer used because it's—

E: Oh, wow. So destructive and dangerous.

MB: A lot of people have died from lung cancer and the suspicion is that it was attributed to that sort of thing.

FB: So, we're going tomorrow. [Laughter]

DB: Oh, let's see what else I have written down.

FB: Things to do. There weren't a whole lot of things to do. [Laughter] There were no amusement parks, things like that. Every base had a theater, so we'd go to the theater. Typically, you'd have a bowling alley.

MB: Mm-hm. A sports stable for horses.

DB: Oh, we all loved horses. We had stables; a lot of us took horseback riding lessons.

FB: The swimming pool.

DB: The beach.

FB: Fort Amador Beach, the one beach on the Pacific side specifically for the Zonians.

MB: We lived up on the hill and we used to take cardboard and sit on the cardboard and go down the hill sitting on cardboard. Remember that?

DB: Yes, I do.

FB: Or getting the dustpan and putting that on a skate and riding down the hill.

MB: Oh, for heaven's sakes. [Laughter]

FB: Or building our own. You and Mary Redding built a nice Lightning—

MB: It was called Lightning, you remember that! Yellow Lightning. It was black with a yellow lightning bolt on it.

FB: Made with skates and boards.

MB: Yeah, rode that thing down that hill.

DB: Yeah. We didn't get television until 1957 or something like that.

MB: I was twelve years old when we finally got a TV set. Gosh, that's incredible.

FB: You were twelve? So that was [19]48—1960. Holy cow.

DB: And then, when it began, it didn't come on the air until something like four o'clock in the afternoon. It went off the air at ten.

FB: Johnny Carson was—

DB: And one station.

FB: Oh, yeah. One station, you're right.

E: Oh, I was just wondering—considering the fact that television wasn't available until 1957 and news probably didn't move as fast as it did today, how did stateside politics kind of percolate through the Panama Canal Zone? Were they heavily influential in the area, or was there kind of an absence of that?

DB: Definitely there was a presence.

MB: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

FB: Through the radio?

DB: But we got most of our news through newspaper and movies.

FB: Oh, yeah.

MB: You went to the movies, you got the news before the film started.

DB: Definitely the politics influenced—

MB: And the Pan-American newspaper was all in English, and they carried a lot of news from the States.

DB: That's right. They had an English edition that carried the news from the States. I remember when Nixon was vice president to Eisenhower, he came to visit Panama. He rode the train and stood on the last car of the train waving to everybody. I remember that distinctly.

FB: You were there, watching him wave?

DB: We saw him, yeah. I think Dad and I made it out together. Or the school, that's what it was. I was in seventh or eighth grade at St. Mary's and they took us, the class, to go see him.

FB: So, we had pools, theaters, bowling alleys and the clubhouse—you've heard of the clubhouse?

N: I don't think so. Or for the word, I didn't really understand exactly what . . .

FB: It was a cafeteria. Wasn't it? A place to socialize.

MB: Basically a big cafeteria and a place to socialize.

FB: You'd go in there and eat there and—

DB: Eat your French fries.

MB: And teen clubs.

DB: And Teen Club was vital. That was vital. You wanted to see anybody—if you wanted to see your crush—

MB: You went to the Teen Club. It was always well-chaperoned. There was always a great band. We hung out there.

FB: We had our sports: baseball, the civic league for baseball. Each of the high schools had football, track, baseball, basketball. Soccer didn't come around until many years later, even after I left.

DB: Yeah, they didn't have gymnastics.

FB: No. They didn't have gymnastics. They had swimming, of course; we had good swimmers. And imagine playing football in the tropics.

DB: With all that heavy gear.

FB: Padding and...the games would have to be at night.

E: Were they big events, the football games?

DB: Oh, yeah.

MB: Oh, yeah, yeah.

DB: Our oldest brother, Joe, graduated in [19]64. He was class president when the riots began that evidentially led to a new treaty and, eventually, of course, it turned over. But that began a lot of—it had a ripple effect.

MB: I want to mention one last thing we used to do, and this was a custom. We did this every year—

FB: Oh, the causeway.

DB: Oh, the causeway.

MB: Wait a minute, wait a minute. At Christmastime, the Christmas trees.

DB: Oh, the Christmas tree bonfire.

MB: We would have a huge bonfire, but we formed teams and we were constantly stealing each other's trees. So, where we lived—down the hill from where we lived—there were old World War II bomb shelters.

FB: Bomb shelters.

MB: So we would store our trees in the bomb shelters.

DB: Oh, my gosh. I forgot about that.

MB: Then the little group that I was—my older brother's group; the guys that did the stealing of the trees and everything—they used me as a spy. So, I was this innocent little thing and I'd find out from some of the other guys where their trees were hidden, and they'd steal. This went on all the time. Every team tried to amass the largest number of Christmas trees, and then at the ballpark—

FB: Yep, at the baseball park.

MB: At the baseball park, everybody would bring their trees and have huge bonfires. Every single Christmas we did that. I can't believe it either.

FB: And we'd hide them up on the roofs.

MB: We'd hide them up on the roofs.

FB: You know, the patio that we had.

MB: Yeah, hide them on the roofs, hide them anywhere we could think of. We wanted to have the most—

FB: Tie them with ropes with cans on them so that if someone tried to steal them, you'd hear them. [Laughter] Things like that, it would wake you up.

DB: Amazing.

FB: Yeah, Christmas tree competition there.

MB: Oh, the other thing I can remember living there on the hill: there was a ledge out between the first and second level of the house. It was a ledge. We would sit on the ledge on one side, as the hill went up and around and came back down.

DB: Cul-de-sac.

FB: Cul-de-sac.

MB: Cul-de-sac. The military policemen would come every night to check, you know. As they drove up the hill, we'd be on one side of the houses and we would yell out, what's the penny made out of? As soon as you came around the other side, the other group would yell out, cheap copper. [Laughter] That was a big thrill. [Laughter] We were being rebellious, you know.

FB: Where we lived, this cul-de-sac we're talking about, during Christmas, it was well-known...

MB: Throughout all of Panama City.

FB: Throughout all of the Canal Zone and Panama City, too. People would come from afar in their cars because all of us in the neighborhood—how many homes would that have been?

MB: About twelve? A dozen homes.

FB: We would put out decorations in our yards, which was something Mommy was real good at. Our mother painted very well, and she would make figurines that stood three to four feet high. But all everyone in the neighborhood had different— I mean, [inaudible 37:00] motorized and animated—

DB: And we had icicles that were—

FB: And fake icicles. It was plywood, but cut out in the shape of icicles.

MB: Painted.

DB: Painted.

FB: Painted with blue and white and sparkles, and everyone would hang them from—

MB: The little ones would entertain themselves with a notebook and pen; lie on their side, as each car came out, we'd copy down the license plate number. [Laughter] And then compare together.

FB: How many did you get? Oh, I got... [Laughter]

DB: But the other unique thing about that, and all the decorations, was that there was no hesitation to put out a nativity scene.

MB: Oh, yeah, you had no problem.

DB: No problem with that whatsoever. In fact, our mother cut out some figurines that represented the different races, and she painted them. There was a little China

doll, and there was a little black boy, and a little white girl with blonde hair, and then the cresh with the baby Jesus. She painted them all and had a spotlight on them, and there was never any complaint about it. Now, you have to be careful of all of that sort of thing.

N: Can you guys go into, maybe, the [19]64 riots and how that affected your family?

DB: Well, that's why I wish my oldest brother were here because, as I mentioned earlier—

MB: He was a senior and I was a freshman that year, so I do remember—

DB: Oh, so, you remember too, of course.

MB: What saddened me was that my mother's family took one side and, of course, my father and we took another side. I can just remember so much sitting on our back porch. We could see the lights of the city and you could see fires that were starting as rioting went on, and then the arguing would start between—

DB: Oh, my gosh.

MB: My aunt and my father and whatever. I'll never forget telling a high school friend of mine, I said, this is when I hate being bicultural, because you're not getting along. [Laughter] Everybody's fighting with each other.

FB: Our older brother, Joe, should be here to talk about that.

MB: It started innocently. It started innocently.

DB: Well, it started—

MB: Got out of hand. Got out of hand.

DB: But the U.S. government always has an intelligence presence in Panama. As such, I worked for the CIA for a while when I graduated from college. I was a translator and after working in Washington, D.C., I was transferred to the Canal Zone. Pardon me. I had an undercover ID, did you know that?

FB: I did not know that.

MB: I did not know that.

DB: Didn't know that about your sister. [Laughter] I was Dona, and I was the only person permitted to answer the red phone. The red phone was the informant calling into the office to report in. A woman named Thelma King was an outspoken Communist and she taught at the University of Panama. I had to go out and take her payoff to her, leave it at a safe house. You know what a safe house is? Anyways, that's part of my life I really wasn't supposed to talk about, but I think it's so far in the past now—

FB: The statute of limitations has passed on that.

DB: Yes, exactly. Thank you. [Laughter]

FB: How many years has it been? That would have been—you graduated in [19]65, so that was about, what, [19]66, [19]67?

DB: [19]65, [19]66.

FB: And is that what Mr. Deerwester was involved with?

DB: I don't remember that name, Deerwester.

FB: They lived up at the top of the hill. They had a son, Barry, my age.

DB: Oh, I remember Barry, but I don't remember that he was involved in anything.

MB: No.

DB: But it was the only building in all of Fort Amador that didn't have any windows.

That was the CIA office. How could anybody not guess that that was where the intelligence was? [Laughter]

FB: That was where, in Fort Amador?

MB: Okay, you were going to talk about the causeway. That was the other thing.

DB: Oh, yes.

FB: That was another thing that we did.

MB: Best make out place in the world, best in the world. [Laughter]

DB: Yes. Contractor's Hill was also a good one.

FB: Yeah. With little to do down there, one of the activities was going out to what we called the causeway. It joined the mainland to three little islands. One of those islands is where the beach was; a very, very small beach.

DB: Which is still there.

FB: With a shark net, and yeah, you just cruise out to the causeway and just hang out. If you were over eighteen, you drank beer out there. You go out at nighttime to make out or whatever. [Laughter]

DB: They had a gorgeous view of the city over there.

MB: Oh, it's beautiful. It's very romantic. There was the city across the bay; the beautiful water, the moon out, the city lights.

DB: What more could you want? It's fabulous. It's all coming to an end . . .

FB: I want to know—what I don't understand, if the causeway was part of Fort Amador, how did civilians get out there? Could they . . . would the military police at the gate of Fort Amador allow..?

DB: Well, we had access to the Army-Navy Club which was in Amador.

FB: Yeah, but I'm talking about civilians from the Panama Canal.

DB: Oh. I don't know.

FB: How did Panama Canal civilians...

MB: I don't know. They must have allowed them.

FB: I guess, okay.

MB: Maybe you had an ID card.

DB: There was a checkpoint; a military, like a guard gate, a guard post.

FB: To every base.

DB: But I think all they had to do was say, we're going out to the causeway, and they had to show an ID, possibly. As long as they weren't Panamanian—looking back on it, that was very unjust.

FB: Some Panamanians got through. Tio . . .

DB: Tio Eduardo.

FB: Tio Eduardo made it out to Panama Beach all the time to do his exercises.

DB: That's right.

FB: Loli's father, **Juenal**, would go out to Fort Amador and walk. So, there were a few that had some privileges—

MB: Pull.

DB: Yeah, they had some pull. They had clout.

FB: To be allowed on the base, to get out to the beach, yeah. What else were the activities? Monday night's spaghetti night at Fort Amador's officers club.

DB: All you can eat for fifty cents. [Laughter]

FB: Spaghetti, garlic bread, salad, iced tea.

DB: I would drive my father crazy because I didn't like spaghetti. I always had to order the seventy-five cent triple-decker, what do you call it?

MB: Club sandwich.

FB: Club sandwich. [Laughter]

MB: Unbelievable.

FB: Bingo. My mom won a lot of bingo. She had a lot of luck.

DB: Lottery.

FB: That was also something at the officers club.

DB: Amazing.

E: When did you guys end up leaving the Panama Canal Zone?

DB: Well, each of the five of us left home to go to college, except for Mike, our youngest brother, who moved to the States with my parents. So I left, essentially, in [19]61 after graduating from high school, but because my parents lived there and because we had Panamanian relatives there, I came back every Christmas and summer.

E: The breaks, right.

DB: Then, afterwards, less often; and then, now, more often.

E: And you mentioned you went to college in DC?

DB: I was an hour out of Washington.

E: Was that transition difficult for you, going from this kind of tropical environment up to the...

DB: Frankly, yes. It was in that regard. I remember my first snowfall. My roommate was from Aruba, and we would run out—she hadn't seen snow, either. The rest of the class, there were only ninety-nine in my class. So, the rest of the class had seen snow and they were, like, what are you doing out here in your PJ's, making angels in the snow, and then walking into the cafeteria eating a snowball?

[Laughter] [inaudible 45:13]

FB: The only way we communicated was either letters or, occasionally, a ham radio.

DB: That's right.

FB: There were no cell phones. To make a call from the Canal Zone up to Maryland—

DB: Was much too expensive.

FB: Was very expensive. So, occasionally, someone came along to offer to hook up a ham radio call and, other than that, it was—

DB: It was during that period of time, when I first started college in [19]61, that the Bay of Pigs in Cuba occurred. Everybody was up in arms that the Russians were going to do something to help the Cubans. I mean, I was a nervous wreck. Somehow, one of my classmates who lived in Maryland—not too far from the college—had a ham radio. Her father said, bring her here, we'll help her

communicate with her family. So we couldn't talk on the phone or do anything, and mail was too slow. So, we really counted on ham radios at times like that.

FB: So then, the next in line: Joe left in [19]64, Malena left in [19]67, I left in [19]71, and then our parents, with our younger brother, finally left in [19]74.

MB: Yeah, because we'd all settled—well, those of us who were married, we settled down in the states.

FB: They settled down in San Diego, California.

DB: Yep.

FB: Didi, how do you feel about turning over the canal and the Canal Zone?

DB: I, frankly, have always had very mixed feelings about it. I think that, probably, the process should have started much, much earlier, and they wouldn't have had all that tumultuous period. On the other hand, I feel that pulling out of the Canal Zone and leaving all that infrastructure to Panama was rather unfair to the U.S. They did not get recompense for just an immense amount of infrastructure that are now being used. I mean, they're still functioning; they're able to be refurbished and used. So, there are different aspects of it. How about you?

FB: I did not like seeing us give up the defense of the canal and the running of it. I did understand—I don't think we were paying very much in rent to Panama, and that could have been much more. I don't think we needed all that land. It was five hundred square miles of land which was basically jungle. But I just didn't think anybody was going to run and maintain the canal as efficiently as the U.S. could.

Maybe I'm being proven wrong now, but you still go back and see some things that are in disarray.

DB: Larry and I go down pretty often in recent years, and we've talked to several people down there who have told us—and shown us—that it's just expanded immensely. If you go down, I don't remember the terms used for where the containers go now; the side of Cristobal High School is not there, it's all containers. So, that's proof that the traffic going through the canal has increased. However, as you cross the canal, when we cross the Atlantic side of the canal—I think it's the Pedro Miguel Locks—you're crossing over at the level of the lock, and you can see the apparatus that was built back in 1914 when it first opened. I think, when the U.S. was there, it was maintained much more meticulously, whereas now, you can see the paint peeling off. You just didn't see things like that when we were there, with North Americans patrolling.

FB: Probably, my feeling is also somewhat selfish, 'cause I don't have a hometown to go back to. I'd like to be able to go back to my old high school; can't do that anymore. The house that I was raised in, in Curundu Heights, it's still there, but all the homes are painted different colors and they all have added their own little modifications to the house. It's not the consistent style—everyone was a light green or greenish-white painting. It's just not what I grew up in.

E: Right.

DB: It was government housing; it was all the same.

FB: It's selfish in that way that, yeah, I don't have what I used to know to go back to.

N: Being from a multicultural family, does that affect your feelings about the turnover to the canal at all?

FB: It's not as easy to say. I don't think Panama could maintain it as well as the US could. You can't say that when you've got relatives there. And yet, you know, they're very well-educated. A lot of them come to the States and get their engineering degrees from Purdue, Georgia Tech. Many of our cousins—

DB: Are Georgia Tech graduates.

FB: Are Georgia Tech and Purdue graduates. Went to Notre Dame and LSU. So, they're very well-educated. And, the University of Panama is a good school.

DB: But I think Panama has always been very multicultural. So, trying to understand it from each perspective is very difficult. Business opportunities have always been—in Panama, not the Canal Zone, now that the Canal Zone is no more. So, a lot of the Saudi Arabians and...I mean, we've got a large Chinese population, Asians, and they're very assimilated into the culture now. But the question was, how has it affected us?

N: Mm-hm, and your opinions about the turnover.

DB: Right. I just agree with Fred that it's difficult to acknowledge that we don't have a home to go home to, except that we do still have relatives there. So, now when we go to Panama, we're in the city. Most of the time when we go up to the beach, into the mountains, we might know people or just to enjoy the environment up there. How did it affect you? How do you feel about it?

MB: It hurt in the beginning, when we first did it. But, now, looking at the results, Panama's growing like crazy and it's financially one of the wealthiest Latin American countries. So, in the long run, it was a good thing.

DB: From the year 2000 until 2005, I was asked to be the President's Liaison to Panama for the National Association of Realtors. In that capacity, I saw Panama just totally blow up. The immense amount of investors that came to Panama, either for personal investment or to invest in businesses, grew in leaps and bounds. I mean, I just feel like I was personally witness to it. So, it was good for Panama. It's just sad on a personal level. [Laughter] Tomorrow, you're going to be interviewing Father Kennedy. Father Kennedy was connected to our family.

FB: For many years.

DB: Yeah, for many, many years. He was associated with St. Mary's parish and, as such, with St. Mary's Parochial School, which is where all of us went to grammar school.

MB: And his friendship with Mommy.

DB: Oh, yes. Very strong friendship with our parents, and my mother in particular. He married when I was first married, in 1968, he did the ceremony. Then—

MB: Then, the next year, I tried to get him to marry me and my husband, and he was gonna be away. That really hurt, because I wanted him to marry us, too. But, anyway.

DB: Yeah. Then, my mother remarried when she was seventy-something—

MB: Seventy-six.

DB: She married a Panamanian, and he did the ceremony for them. Then, when my mother was very sick, he came and gave her the last rites.

MB: But all this was up here.

DB: All this was up here.

MB: In Florida.

DB: In Florida. Then after my husband passed away, I remarried Larry Corgan, who has a big Zonian family down in the Canal Zone. He came from Philadelphia down to Florida to marry us. So he's been—

MB: A part of our family.

DB: A real vital part of our spiritual lives for a long time. Social, too. He's quite social. [Laughter] Last night, he had to have his martini. [Laughter] Oh, my gosh.

MB: Yeah, anyway.

N: Maybe you could talk about the Catholic culture down in the Zone. Was it prevalent?

DB: Definitely. Well, Panama itself is a Catholic country. There was a large percentage of Catholic parishioners in the Canal Zone. But, I would say, generally speaking, it was a Christian group of Americans that lived in the Canal Zone.

MB: Mostly, yeah.

DB: There were Methodists, and there was a United Church of Christ, and there was a Lutheran church, and there was—

FB: Episcopalian.

MB: Yeah, it was a real—

FB: It was very much like the U.S.

MB: Very, very. Yeah, a good mix. But one interesting thing was, the marriages in Panama between Jews and Catholics. That went on much more than it did in the States, and I think it's because it was so, so small. Families knew each other and everything.

DB: Mm-hm. It must be confusing to you, though, to hear us talk about the Canal Zone but then Panama. Because there were two distinct—

MB: Two very distinct cultures down there.

DB: The Americans who lived on that strip of land called the Canal Zone, and then the Panamanians. So we're referring, in reference to these marriages—

MB: In Panama itself.

DB: Interfaith marriages, that was Panama itself.

MB: Yeah.

FB: Was there a Catholic school on the Atlantic side? Wasn't there?

DB: Yes. I went to St. Mary's Academy, first and second grade.

FB: On the Pacific side, there was the one Catholic school, which also happened to be St. Mary's.

DB: The stories you could tell. [Laughter]

FB: It was run by the Sisters of—well—

DB: First, it was the Franciscans. I had the Franciscan ones, then you had—

FB: I had them up until kindergarten, and then first grade for me on up, the Sisters of Mercy out of Brooklyn, New York.

MB: Out of Brooklyn, New York. [Laughter]

FB: How they arranged that, I don't know. [Laughter]

MB: It's very interesting.

FB: They wore their big, white habits. We had a uniform; you had to wear a tie and, again, you're thinking about the tropics; why would we be wearing ties? But they brought that from New York.

MB: My name is—everybody calls me Malena, but it's actually Marie Elena. When the nuns arrived from Brooklyn, I was told by my teacher that I would no longer be Maria; that I would be Mary.

DB: Oh, my gosh. I never knew that story.

MB: I still have schoolwork and it's Mary Bremer.

DB: No kidding.

MB: Took them a while to finally settle in and adjust to the culture. [Laughter] But no, no. It had to be...

DB: That is funny. My real name, I was named after my mother, Dalys: D-a-l-y-s. The nuns couldn't pronounce Dalys; they said Dallas. I would just cringe. No, no, no, don't call me Dallas. But Fred was Fred and Joe was Joe—

FB: They called me Bob. I don't know why. [Laughter]

DB: Silly.

FB: What else? For us, I'll tell you something else to do. Again, because of my dad having the business—not so much my sisters, but I and my older brother, we spent a lot of our time Saturdays going out to the farm. We had a lot of open fields, so we spent a lot of time cutting grass, maybe mixing the feed for the chickens. We'd pick grapefruit and take them back to the Canal Zone. I'd walk around our neighborhood—

DB: With his little wagon. [Laughter]

FB: With this burlap sack full of grapefruit, and sell them. Three for a nickel...What else? One time, we had a lot of pineapple, but I think that was a couple years before me in the field up there.

MB: Oh, yeah. Across the creek, there was a big field of pineapple. We had cashew trees, genip trees.

FB: Yeah, genip trees.

MB: And the horses, horses. Six horses.

DB: At one point, we had six horses. What else can we tell you? [Laughter]

N: How was the transition coming back to America for your parents?

FB: Good question.

DB: It was tough. It was a difficult transition. I think that my mother never dreamed that she'd be moving from Panama to the United States permanently, after leaving her parents behind and her siblings behind and all the nieces and nephews. Then, my dad, he was happy about moving back to the States because he was originally from Pennsylvania, but it was difficult in that they

decided to move to California. At the time, I was the one who had children, so their only grandchildren—I was living with my husband who, at the time, was with the FBI. We were living in San Diego. So, they moved to San Diego and their marriage, basically, fell apart. So, in that regard, it was difficult. It was kind of like, well, the beginning of the end.

MB: Well, the other reason, too—she closed down the radio station because—

FB: Torrijos?

MB: Torrijos, the dictator that came before Noriega.

DB: That's why she closed down the radio station, that's right.

FB: Is that really it?

MB: It was easier for her to leave with that done, because they kept trying to tell her what she could and could not put on the radio.

DB: Right.

FB: I didn't know that.

DB: But I'm surprised that none of us stayed to work down there. Out of the five of us, Fred was the only one who married a Panamanian, but they had lived in the States all this time.

FB: Yeah, but I married one up here in the States.

DB: You met her up here.

FB: Yeah, I met her up here in the States and I got married up here. I don't know if I felt comfortable enough with the Spanish language to have stayed down there and done business in Panama.

DB: But now you would.

FB: I don't know. You know, I would, because everyone down there speaks English.

[Laughter] We'd get along just fine.

MB: We all speak Spanish, but you're much more fluent than the rest of us.

DB: Joe, our youngest brother, is very fluent in Spanish.

MB: The one who left at fourteen. He's the one who's most fluent. [Laughter]

FB: Yeah.

MB: But mine is just conversational Spanish, so I would never dream of going into business down there, because it's a different vocabulary. That's probably the way you feel.

DB: I mean, our father was from German parents, German-American parents. Malena and her husband had the opportunity to live in Germany for quite a while. Two tours of duty, right?

MB: Mm-hm.

DB: He was a West Point graduate. But I was in Germany a couple years ago and I thought, I should feel comfortable with this language. In Panama, we were only exposed to Spanish, English, and occasionally French, because of our grandmother.

MB: Well, at home, Dad would try to teach us. We all learned how to count to ten. There were little children's songs we had to learn in German.

DB: I flew for Pan-Am back in the dark ages when you couldn't be married, when Pan-Am was vibrant.

FB: Are you familiar with Pan-Am?

N: Mm-hm.

DB: Pan-American World Air. Occasionally, they would ask me to read the German announcement because I knew enough German—and they had the translation right there—but you had to read it in both languages. So, I think back on that; that was a different person. I can't imagine being able to do that now. [Laughter] It's such a guttural language, you know?

MB: It's so different from Spanish.

DB: Very different from Spanish. So, can you review those questions? Have we touched on everything?

FB: How did you interface with the U.S. military and the Panamanian people? Pretty much, you interface with both. We pretty much covered that.

DB: Right.

FB: We had our Teen Club affairs and our football games. Then we also had our cousins and aunts and uncles in Panama City. So, we'd go to their birthday parties and—

DB: Malena and I were asked to be debutantes, so we each made our debut in Panama City. I ran for Miss Panama one year, when I was seventeen. They found out that I wasn't gonna be eighteen until after the deadline. So although I made it to the final ten, I was booted out because I was six days too young or something like that.

MB: I was offered a theater scholarship to study until they found out that I wasn't a hundred percent Panamanian. I lost it because of Daddy's—

DB: Oh, my gosh. I didn't know that.

FB: Theater scholarship to where? To Penn State?

MB: To whatever college I was gonna go. They were going to give me—I started as a theater major when I came up to Penn State, but I lost the scholarship when the man who was going to give it realized that instead—no, no, no. I'm only giving them to full—

DB: You were a half-breed. [Laughter] If we were to talk about prejudices, I think the only time I felt prejudice against us was when somebody was from an American family in the Canal Zone discovered that our parents were mixed American and Panamanian, it was almost as though, oh, you're one of them. You know?

MB: I was called a spick every once in a while.

DB: Yeah. Occasionally, I heard that name. No big deal. So politically correct these days.

MB: Now and then, oh. It's just a word. Just sticks and stones.

DB: Did you ever feel that way?

FB: No.

MB: No?

DB: We all come from a little bit different perspective.

MB: Mm-hm, right.

DB: Last month, or two months ago, our youngest brother who lives in California is turning fifty this year. So, the rest of us—Joe, who is not here with us—and the three of us, we flew out to California and spent five days with him. Or four days with him?

FB: Four days.

DB: No spouses allowed, no children allowed, no grandchildren. [Laughter] We had a wonderful, wonderful time. It was a blast looking over my mother's letters—letters my father had sent to my mother during World War II. My mother kept them, and we were reading through them and looking at old pictures. It was just fantastic.

FB: You didn't wake me up for that part. [Laughter]

DB: Say that again?

FB: You didn't wake me up for that part. [Laughter] I missed out on that.

DB: You were asleep?

FB: Yeah, yeah. Ended up in a red square cookie can.

MB: Yes, yes.

DB: He's in the film industry, and we keep thinking that, someday, he'll get all of these letters together and write up a script for it. We'll see it on the Lifetime Television or something. Beautiful letters.

MB: Anything else? Your holidays celebrated. Oh, Thanksgiving. My mother always had Thanksgiving dinner for our family, and now, her family celebrates Thanksgiving.

DB: Yeah, that's kinda neat.

FB: Yeah. We would have our Thanksgiving dinner, and who would come over? Ito and Ita.

DB: Ito and Ita, our grandparents.

FB: And one other one.

DB: And Irma, Irma was my mother's youngest sister. She was born thirteen years after the fifth child was born; along came my Aunt Irma. She's close to my age.

MB: And Mommy's her godmother.

DB: And Mommy's her godmother.

MB: So, that's why she was always invited.

FB: With Julito, or by herself?

DB: Well, by herself before she was married, and then with Julito after she was married. Now they carry out the tradition. So, generally speaking, the Panamanians would not celebrate. That's an American holiday. But, now, our side of the family—Panamanian side of our family is celebrating. That's kinda neat.

FB: Christmas, we always went to Ita's house to get—that afternoon or Christmas day, go to our grandparents' house in Panama City. Share in a—

DB: Yeah, gift exchange.

FB: The eggnog and—

DB: She made the best eggnog. You have no idea, it was delicious.

FB: What's the . . . ?

DB: *Ron ponche*.

FB: No, no, no. That hard almond...

DB: Oh, I can't remember what that was called.

FB: It's white, made of almond. It's got a wafer on top of it and it cracks, very hard.

DB: I don't remember. Is there a word for it in Spanish?

FB: *Turrón*, something like that.

DB: I don't remember that. I must not have liked it very much. [Laughter]

MB: Fourth of July, we always had the parades in Balboa.

FB: Oh, yeah.

MB: With Shriners. That was always a big deal.

DB: That's right. The Shriners came out with these little buggies. Fourth of July was always celebrated. Remember the Shriners—

FB: Yeah. Wouldn't they do fireworks in Panama City and we would watch them from the stadium? We would watch them from the back of our yard. The back of our house overlooked Panama City, a portion of Panama City.

DB: Yeah. We grew up on a hill, and the stadium was right on the other side of the boundary between the Canal Zone and Panama. That's right.

FB: They shoot those fireworks—

MB: Fireworks—

DB: Even though they were Panamanians. That's kind of neat.

FB: We did our own. I'm not even sure if we did—did they? Were there any organized firework displays in the Canal Zone?

DB: At the ballpark in Curundu, yeah.

FB: Oh, yeah?

DB: Yeah. I remember sparklers. That's the only thing Dad would let us handle.

FB: [Laughter] New Year's was a big thing at the Tivoli.

DB: Oh, that was so much fun.

MB: Big deal.

FB: The Tivoli Hotel in the Canal Zone.

DB: When was that built?

FB: The place to go for New Year's Eve.

DB: It was a wooden structure.

E: The big wooden, yeah. They knocked it down recently.

DB: Very elegant.

FB: I'm sure someone else has mentioned it in your talk.

E: Yeah, definitely.

DB: The dancing, the music was so exuberant. You could feel the floor inundate.

MB: And we were teenagers. We were teenagers.

DB: We were teenagers.

MB: And we were celebrating as though we were twenty-three. [Laughter] And nobody said anything. It's not a big deal.

FB: The drinking age was eighteen, right?

MB: In the Canal Zone.

FB: So, if you were a junior or senior in high school and you could drive, you'd just go into Panama City and do your drinking, because you could pay for your drinking.

DB: If you could reach up and put a quarter up on the bar. [Laughter]

MB: Well, that's what amazed me when I came to the States to go to college, was—a date in Panama was, went to dinner, went to a movie, and then you went to the Hilton Hotel, to the bar, where they always had music, and you ordered your drink. There was a casino, and we could go in and gamble in the casino. Came to the States and I thought, holy cow. What are these kids do when they go out on a date? I don't want your son listening to this. [Laughter] They go to a motel room to sit around and drink. Just to drink. There's no—yeah, and that really blew my mind. That just totally blew my mind.

DB: It's almost as though, when you have too many restrictions, you don't mature to a point where you can handle those things that were so prohibited. You know?

E: Certainly.

DB: So when, all of a sudden you're permitted to do it, they go gangbusters. Go overboard. That's how it seems, anyway.

MB: That's how it seemed then, yeah.

E: Just a little, yeah.

DB: Just a little. [laughter]

MB: Because we were allowed to drink at home. My parents could give me beer because, when I was very, very little, I was very, very skinny. They said beer would fatten me up. So, even as just a child, they'd give me about that much in a glass—every day—just a little bit of beer to put some weight on me. We'd have

wine for special dinner. For Thanksgiving, we'd have wine with dinner. So, it was a real shock to go off to college and find out that...

DB: Yes. I remember Dad and Mommy would have happy hour out on the porch in Curundu Heights.

MB: Every day.

DB: And Dad liked his Manhattans. When I was a senior in high school, he asked me, would you like me to fix you a Manhattan? And he did. I mean, I sat with them, drank it slowly like a nice, young lady would do. [Laughter] That was part of our culture down there. But our culture, because we did have a Panamanian side, was different from most Americans raised in the Canal Zone, I think. I'm sure there were many other families where one parent was Panamanian, one parent was American.

MB: Oh, yeah. Quite a few.

DB: I hope we'd given you enough material.

N: I think it was great.

E: Definitely, yeah.

N: It was great to listen to you.

FB: I guess you've heard the *cayuco* race?

N: Yes.

DB: You said you did it.

FB: I did it. It was actually—

MB: I did it in 1998.

DB: When you were fifty.

N: Oh, wow.

MB: Well, we all—I was just going to turn fifty, and I said, better do it now. Because—

E: That sounds like a great experience.

MB: You rowed through the Panama Canal. I think that was such an awesome experience.

DB: Did you only have four on your—

FB: Four, yeah.

DB: How old were you when you did it?

FB: I was a sophomore.

DB: In high school.

FB: Sophomore in high school.

MB: Yeah, girls weren't allowed to do it then.

DB: That's right.

FB: Because it was sponsored by the Explorers.

MB: Yeah, okay.

FB: Explorer Scouts, so it was an all-male competition.

MB: It was an all-male competition until...the [19]70s? [19]80s?

FB: I don't know when they went co-ed. Girls State and Boys State was something that you guys had. They'd had gone by the time I was—

DB: No kidding. Oh, this was—did you go?

MB: I went to Girls State.

FB: Girls State, Boys State?

MB: That was called—

DB: It was very educational. Held, usually, over spring break or Easter vacation.

FB: Yeah, or Easter vacation.

DB: You had to have a certain G.P.A. to be permitted to go or to be invited to attend, and you learned about state government. By the end of the week, you had elected a governor, a secretary of state, attorney general.

MB: Yeah. We weren't allowed to go anywhere else; we were stuck for one whole week.

DB: Learning about state government. It was a fabulous program. Very, very good, very beneficial.

FB: The Scouts were down there, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts. What else?

MB: I don't know, but they need the room.

DB: Time flies when you're having fun. [Laughter]

FB: Golf was big down there.

DB: Golf was very big.

FB: Fishing. Baseball, they had the V.F.W. baseball and all the different baseball leagues. They'd sponsor—V.F.W., I remember Joe going around to sell decals that you would put on your bumper car for every dollar or two dollars, and that's how they'd raise money to send a team to the States.

DB: That's right. That's how Joe got to the States.

FB: For competition . . . football. You know who led the B.H.S. in touchdowns in 1970?

MB: Who?

DB: I was going to say, Gary Ness? No—you.

FB: 1970. I did.

MB: Did you? That's awesome.

FB: Now, ask me how many touchdowns. [Laughter]

DB: Three.

FB: One. [Laughter]

MB: That's funny. We were doing that badly?

DB: Oh, my gosh. You mean Cristobal beat you?

FB: Yep. Even the one game I made a touchdown, we lost.

DB: That's incredible.

FB: And it was against Cristobal.

DB: Oh, my gosh.

FB: My junior year.

DB: Well, my sister brought a copy of *Stuck in the French Canal*.

MB: The French Panama Canal. It's—I guess the museum has one, yeah.

E: Oh, wow.

DB: Did we give you enough disjointed material?

E: Yeah.

N: That's great.

E: That was fantastic. Thank you so much.

[End of interview]

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Je